

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 11th May 2025

Bible text: Acts 9:36-end

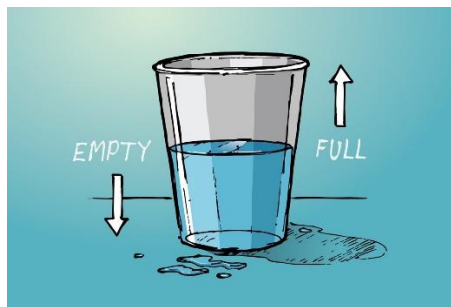
If I said to you: “glass half full or half empty?”, what would you think of?

It’s an English expression about our expectations of what might happen

Sometimes it also describes our basic attitude or personality – optimistic, pessimistic

Another saying is butter side up or down? – if you were to drop a piece of bread and butter how do you expect it to fall?

Is there a saying like that in your country of origin?



Personalities apart, our expectations are shaped by what usually happens in general and also what has happened to us in particular

This is the basis of the scientific method

They are norms for how countries can interact in justice and peace. We live in times where many such social norms are being deeply shaken

These are also our personal presuppositions

They are helpful, they enable us to predict, generalise which gives shape to life, enables us to design aircraft to fly, food to grow, economies to function, enter relationships

One of the most fundamental presuppositions for human beings is this: that when people die they stay dead – that is the general rule and our particular experience

In our Bible readings from Acts Sunday by Sunday after Easter we read about what happened to people who had heard about the possibility that even this, most fundamental experience, was challenged by the assertion: alleluia, Christ is risen: **he is risen indeed, alleluia!**

These people of the early church had heard news of this strange possibility

Others, like Peter, and in growing numbers, had actually witnessed the reality of Jesus alive once more

But all of the gospel accounts make it clear that the original followers of Jesus had little or no expectation that Jesus would be raised, even though He had promised the He would

So the women come to the tomb on the first Easter day with spices to anoint the body, concerned about how to move the stone

As Jesus stands again in the upper room, his disciples including Thomas are fearful, unsure as Jesus invites them to see the mark of the nails in his hands, the spear in his side

But something is starting to shift

So in the place of the presupposition that dead men don't rise again, there is now confusion, dissonance as two competing experiences jostle for position in their minds

As we get to chapter 9 of Acts, we see this alternative presupposition becoming a possibility, an openness that with God something new might just be possible

It is a story about Tabitha or Dorcas – an ordinary Jewish woman who has become an early decider about this Jesus, so much so that she is called disciple

But even so, she becomes sick and dies.

According to custom she is washed, but not immediately buried which would have been the custom

Instead, it says “they” laid out in an upper room and word is sent to Peter: Please come without delay

The “they” seems to relate to the same status as Tabitha herself. Indeed, it is made explicit in v38 as it says the disciples sent for Peter and then, as he arrives take him to the upper room

At no point is there mention of a hope in resurrection among the fellow believers in Joppa or even Peter as he arrives

But it all suggests they are open to an alternative, that things might now be different, open to the possibility of what might be

In contrast there are the widows, who focus only on what has been – look at her fine needlework, how generous she was

For Jewish hearers there are echoes here of OT stories of men of God, like Elijah, intervening to bring life out of death, hope or our fear

But here the story is much more recent. It's the possibilities that now are because of this rumour of the raising of Jesus

Peter kneels to pray.

And it is out of this prayer that he then acts, turning to the body, (interesting language) and only then using the woman's name: Tabitha, get up

Last week we heard about how the early church began to see itself as the Body of Christ, the means by which the risen Jesus continues to be present in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit

So, as Peter prays, I think we can have a fair guess of what was going on in that prayer: “Lord, what are You doing here, and how are You calling me to join in?”

If this is true, this astounding assertion we made on Easter day – that Jesus has been raised from the dead - then it is like a paradigm shift in what is possible in our world

It means that an old way of being, in which the whole created order had become trapped – by sin and death – the power of that old order has been broken by the death and resurrection of Jesus

... and anything is possible

And we, as followers of this risen Jesus, this present and powerful Jesus, are invited to allow our presuppositions to be challenged and gently but firmly turned upside down

We are called to see life, to see the world differently

To see as Jesus sees



mission-shaped spirituality

the transforming power of mission

susan hope

In her book *Mission-shaped spirituality*, the writer Susan Hope puts it like this, describing how Jesus' way of seeing can shape us. (PPOint)

We become, she says, people who like Jesus ...

"... manage to be deeply moved by what we encounter in the suffering of others without being so overwhelmed that we cannot also see God's creative possibilities in the given moment. His imaginative seeing can release new shapes from apparently fixed patterns. It is all about opening the eyes and seeing what is there but seeing it in a different way." (p22-23)

The early church's way of seeing began to be reshaped to imagine new possibilities as they started to wrestle with this amazing possibility

Alleluia, Christ is risen

He is risen indeed: alleluia

If this is true, then everything can change and anything is possible

And it begins with this prayer, offered with open hands, open for Him to remove and add what He wishes to

And with open eyes – yes seeing the world with compassion, but also open to see and imagine the new that He is doing

Lord, what are you doing? Help me to see it. And how are you calling me to join in?

Pray this prayer, invite open hands

In other words, Peter joins in with what God is already doing

Instead